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ABSTRACT

This booklet is a special report on black Americans, part of a series on ethnic perspectives. It covers their experiences as slaves, their struggle for equality in America, and other aspects of black history and culture. Study questions for recall and analysis of the text are presented at the end of each of the three chapters in the book. The following topics are covered: (1) experiences before and during slavery; (2) the survival, strength and spirit of black culture; (3) the participation of black people in American historical events; (4) legislative guarantees of freedom; (5) the struggle for civil rights; (6) black pride; and (7) black achievements. An eight-item bibliography is included. (VM)

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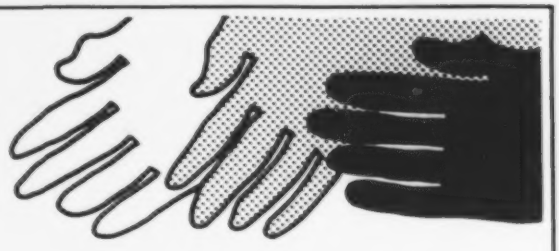

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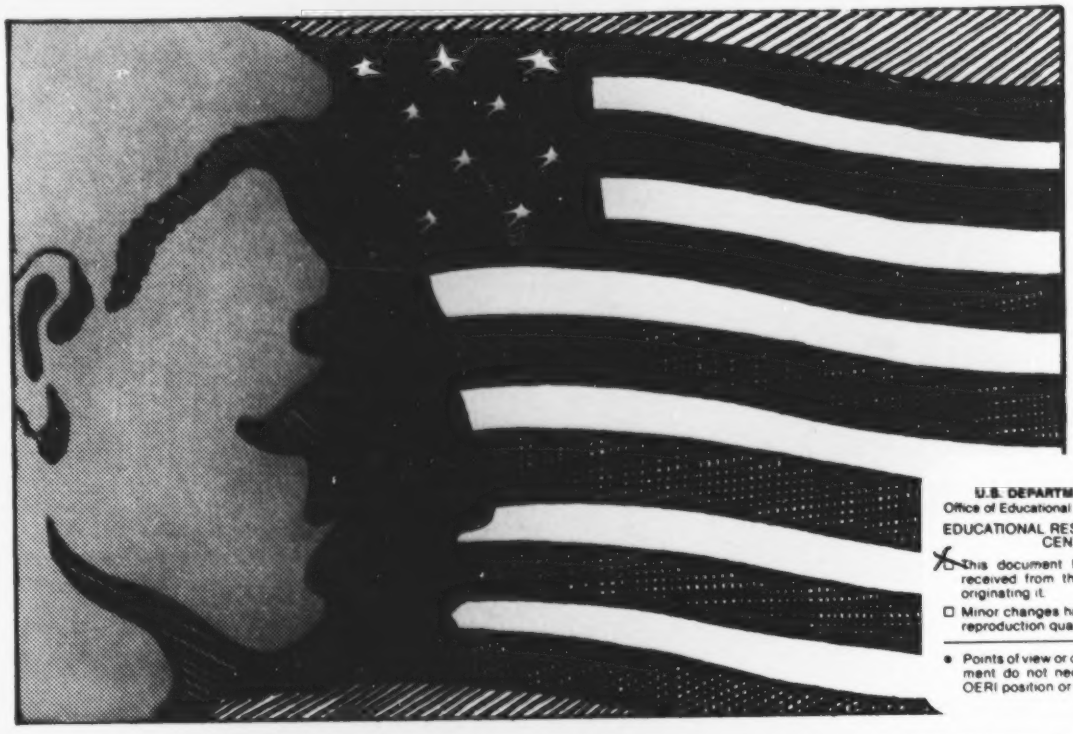

....a special report

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The Black American Experience

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Preface

America is the home of many cultures and races of people. Because of this, the story of our country's past and present can be told from many different points of view. This booklet looks at American history through the eyes of one cultural group, the Black Americans. As you read, ask yourself how the Black American point of view might be the same or different from other cultural groups in our country.

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Chapter 1

Against Their Will

The first Blacks who came to America were not slaves. In fact, Blacks were among the earliest explorers of the North American continent. Diego el Negro, a Black man, was with Columbus on his final trip to the Americas in 1502. Black explorers were also among the crews of Coronado, Balboa, and Cabeza de Vaca when they explored America during the 1500's.

The earliest Black settlers came to New England in 1619. They were, for the most part, indentured servants and not slaves. Indentured servants paid for their voyage to America by working for their master for 5 to 7 years. As servants, they were given many more rights than were allowed to slaves.

In contrast to these early Black explorers and settlers, however, most Black people who came to America between 1600 and 1800 were forced here against their will to live out the rest of their lives in slavery. Many of these Black people came from highly developed tribes, kingdoms, and states in Africa. Most slaves were taken from West Africa. This area was close to the coast where ships could be loaded with their slave cargoes for America. These kidnapped Blacks were not savages or ignorant, primitive people as is sometimes imagined. In fact, they had developed rich and long lasting civilizations in Africa. The state of Ghana, for example, was in existence 1,200 years before Columbus ever set sail on his journey of exploration. Ghana was rich in gold and culture, and its people were highly organized in family and political groupings. The people of Sonhay, another West African state, had developed well established schools, banks, and business organizations. The drawing that begins this chapter shows the city of Timbuktu, part of another highly developed African culture during the 1600's.

The slave trade was created because it produced large profits for the merchants of Europe, the West Indies, and North America.

At first, most African slaves were sold in the West Indies to be used as laborers on the huge sugar plantations. Blacks were also sold in the American colonies, usually as servants in the early 1600's. These Blacks could work to earn their freedom, because slavery had not been legally recognized. But gradually more and more laws were passed to limit the rights of Blacks, until by 1700 the system of slavery was made completely legal. The key law was one which forced children to have the same status as their parents. According to this law, the children of slaves also became slaves. In this way the future generations of Blacks were locked into a system of slavery from which there was little chance of escape. Most Black people in America thus became the property of whites, to be owned, bought, sold and used in any way the whites chose.

The slave trade was very hard on the people who were kidnapped from West Africa. The slave traders crowded as many Blacks as possible aboard their ships to gain maximum profits in America. Living conditions aboard the ships were filthy and unhealthy. Food and water were of poor quality and in short supply. Diseases spread rapidly under these conditions. Black people were chained together and often beaten and abused during the voyage. It was not unusual for over half of them to die during the 40 to 60 day "Middle Passage" from West Africa to the Americas.

Once the Blacks arrived in America, the mistreatment continued. They were forbidden to speak their own language or practice their own

religion. Blacks who came from the same region in West Africa were separated so they could not speak with each other or make plans to escape. Those who had been community leaders in Africa were separated out because the whites feared they might try to organize rebellions. Each slave's African name was taken away and replaced by an American name given by the slave master. This treatment of the newly arriving slaves is an example of cultural genocide. This means it was an attempt to weaken the Black people by destroying their African culture and forbidding them to live in their traditional way.

The slave trade was also very destructive for the nations of West Africa. Over a period of 300 years, at least 10 million Black people were taken from this area and sold into slavery in North and South America. In this way the West African nations lost many of their strongest and most talented people. The slave trade also caused the West African people to fight and make war against themselves in order to win captives for sale to the European slave traders. Thus, the leaders of different tribes and nations would sometimes compete against each other to gain the guns and other trade items the Europeans gave in exchange for slaves.

It should be pointed out that slavery was not invented by the Europeans and Americans at this time in history. Slavery had been practiced in Ancient Rome and Greece and probably as far back in history as humans have been in existence. Some groups of Native American people had systems of slavery before the whites arrived on the continent, and slavery existed among the West African tribes before the European slave

traders appeared. But nowhere had there been a system of slavery more vast or more destructive to the human body and spirit than that which grew up in America between 1700 and 1850.

Survival as Slaves

Slavery was always a sticky problem for white Americans because it went against many of the ideas which led to the creation of this country. How could white people believe in "freedom and equality for all" and the basic human right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," while at the same time maintaining a system of slavery? Many of the founding fathers of our country, who wrote these ideals, themselves owned slaves.

This problem was usually handled by explaining the "economic necessity" of slavery. This means that white plantation owners and other business people needed a cheap source of labor. Who could find a cheaper employee than a slave? Another line of argument described the Black people as "savage," "heathen," or "non-human." From this point of view, slave owners could comfort themselves into believing that they were actually helping the "ignorant" Negroes by giving them a valuable role in society, by making them Christians, or by "civilizing" them. Of course, this ignores the fact that West African Blacks had their own religions and highly developed cultures long before being brought to America. But by convincing themselves that Blacks were less than human, it became easier for the slave owners to treat Blacks in an inhuman way.

In fact, the primary reason for slavery was economic. The huge sugar and cotton plantations of the West Indies and the southern states of America could not have gained profits without slave labor. When Eli Whitney invented his cotton gin, which could clean large amounts of cotton in a short period of time, the demand for slaves became even greater. The cotton gin made it possible to expand the plantations, greatly increasing the required number of field laborers. As the cotton industry grew, the South became more and more dependent on slave labor.

To control the ever growing number of slaves, the owners and the legal authorities set up a system of rules which became known as the Slave Codes. Different states had different codes, but most of them included rules like the following:

1. It was against the law for a slave to learn to read.
2. Slaves could not meet together in large groups.
3. A slave could not testify against a white person in court.
4. A slave could be whipped or punished in almost any way the owner saw fit.
5. Slaves could not enter into legal marriage.
6. Slaves could not own their own animals or land.

Most of these rules were meant to "keep Negroes in their place" and prevent uprisings or rebellions among the slaves.

How were Black people in America able to survive this system of slavery and inhuman treatment? Many Blacks survived by learning to obey the white man's rules, while at the same time secretly hating their masters and the system of slavery that held them down. Others survived by tricking their owners in different ways. They would pretend to be sick and unable to work. Some would intentionally break farm equipment or cut off plants with their hoes to get back at their owners. But besides these methods, Blacks mainly survived by developing their own separate system of culture and society even while they were slaves. They told stories, created their own music and songs, and formed their own stable marriages and families even though these ties were not usually recognized by whites. It is a tribute to the strength of Black people as a group that they were able to come through the experience of slavery, and yet keep their rich and positive view of life.

It must be stated that not all of the whites who owned slaves were evil people. Many were merely products of their time, caught up in a way of life they did not create and did not have the strength to change. Some slave owners tried to treat their slaves as human beings, and some granted slaves their freedom. Most southern land owners did not have the huge plantations and large numbers of slaves often pictured in movies and books. In 1860, 50 percent of the slave owners held less than five slaves each and only ten percent had more than twenty slaves. Only the largest plantations held a hundred or more slaves. Also, most families in the South had no

slaves at all. Only about one-fourth of all southern families in 1860 were slave owners. Not all of the slaves were field workers, either, for many were owned by urban dwellers and performed highly skilled craftsmen's jobs. On the plantation, most slaves worked in the fields, but some performed skilled labor tasks and others worked in the household of the owner.

Not All Were Slaves

It is sometimes assumed that all Black people in America before the Civil War were slaves. This is not true. The pages of American history are rich with the stories of free Blacks who were active in every part of our past. We have already seen that Blacks were involved in the earliest exploration and non-Indian settlement of this continent. Over 5,000 Black men fought for American independence in the Revolutionary War against the British. In fact, Crispus Attucks, a free Black man, was one of the first Americans to die in the struggle for independence. He was shot by the British during the Boston Massacre in 1770. Many of the slaves who fought in the Revolutionary War were given their freedom as a reward for heroic service. Many slaves also ran away to fight with the British and left for England when the British were defeated. Why should they help fight for the white man's independence in America, when they themselves were held down by the chains of slavery?

Blacks were also involved in every phase of the Westward Movement, as trappers, hunters, explorers, fighters, lawmen, and even outlaws.

Jean Baptiste, for example, was a Black trapper and fur trader who became the first permanent settler in Chicago. George Bush, another Black man, was one of the early settlers on Puget Sound in Washington State. His son was later elected to the first Washington State Legislature. Nat Love, a former slave, went West where he became a cowboy and famous wild man with the title "Deadwood Dick." Among his good friends were Billy the Kid and Jesse James.

There were several ways a Black person could become free before the Civil War. Some Blacks were the descendants of original Black settlers who had never been slaves. Others were the children of indentured servants who had earned their freedom. Some slaves were able to earn enough money by doing extra work to buy their own freedom. Others won their freedom by fighting in the Revolutionary War or performing some other special service. Occasionally, after the death of a slave owner, his slaves would be declared free in his will. Many slaves were able to escape, which was a very risky way to gain freedom. Still others, such as Jenny Slew of Massachusetts, were able to win their freedom in court through legal proceedings.

In whatever way Blacks were able to win their freedom, the actual life they were forced to live as freedmen was often no better than slavery. Their freedom was constantly challenged by whites, and they were forever under the threat of being returned to slavery if they did not have convincing proof of their freedom. Often free Blacks had to obey the same Slave Codes as those in bondage, and

there were some states such as Illinois, Indiana, and Iowa where free Blacks were not allowed to settle. Whites were often afraid that free Blacks would take jobs away from them, therefore, they were usually given the most undesirable and low-paying work.

In all, there were about half a million free Blacks in America by the time of the Civil War (1860). At this same time, there were over four million Blacks still bound to slavery.

Chapter 1 Study Questions

Please answer these questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. What part of Africa was the home of most of the kidnapped slaves? Describe at least three hardships these Africans had to suffer during their voyage to America.

2. Describe at least three ways that Blacks suffered cultural genocide when they first arrived in America.

3. The practice of slavery went against many of the ideals of the Constitution. Describe two arguments used to explain away this problem.

4. Give three examples of the rules which were often included in the Slave Codes.

5. What Black man was one of the earliest Americans to die in the Revolutionary War?

6. Imagine you were a Black person at the time of the Revolutionary War. Give two reasons why you would fight on the side of the Americans. Give two reasons why you might choose to fight for the British.

Black Settler

Chapter 2

The Vision of Freedom

Ever since slavery was first invented, there have been people fighting against it. Very few Black slaves in America peacefully accepted their bondage. Many rebelled or ran away, but the system of punishment was severe. In spite of this, the vision of freedom was always kept alive.

One way to keep the hope of freedom alive was to talk about it, sing about it, pray about it, and dream about it whenever the whites weren't watching. Blacks became experts at doing this. Another expression of freedom was to run away, and many slaves tried that. They would go alone or in small groups and were severely punished if caught. Runaways would usually travel by night, guided by the North Star, which led them North to the hope of freedom. Often the runaways would join with the Indians, who also suffered at the hands of the whites, and were usually friendly and sympathetic to the Blacks. Because of this, Blacks became members of many different Indian tribes during the 1800's.

One of the bravest and most famous of runaway slaves was Harriet Tubman. She escaped when she was 25 years old and returned to the South 19 times to lead over 300 slaves to freedom. Her heroic efforts were part of a loosely organized system called the Underground Railroad, which helped thousands of slaves escape North before the Civil War. White people as well as Blacks were involved in hiding, feeding, and caring for the runaway slaves as they gradually moved North from one "station" to the next.

The dream of freedom was also kept alive through slave revolts and rebellions. The slave revolts definitely disproved the notion of "the happy Negro" who quietly accepted his life under the care of the "good white master." Nat Turner led one such revolt in Virginia in 1831. Angered by their treatment as slaves, he and 70

followers killed 60 whites before they were finally captured. Over 100 Blacks were killed in the uprising, and another 16 were hanged with Nat Turner when it ended. In another uprising Gabriel Prosser organized 1,000 slaves to take over Richmond, Virginia. He and his small army were held back by a rainstorm which gave the troops time to capture them. Prosser and 30 others were hanged.

Another method used to keep the vision of freedom alive was to fight with ideas and words rather than with weapons. Many white people as well as Blacks became involved in the battle against the idea of slavery. Members of some of the white churches in America became the first to speak out. The following words were recorded by the Quakers of Pennsylvania as early as 1688:

> . . . There is a saying, that we should do to all men like as we will be done ourselves . . . Here (in America) is liberty of conscience, which is right and reasonable; here ought to be likewise liberty of the body . . . But to bring men hither, or to rob and sell them against their will, we stand against . . . Pray, what thing in the world can be done worse towards us, that if man should rob or steal us away, and sell us for slaves to strange countries; separating husbands from their wives and children . . . have these poor Negroes not as much right to fight for their freedom, as you have to keep them slaves?*

People who spoke out against slavery became known as Abolitionists because they wanted to abolish, or get rid of, slavery. The

*George H. Moore, Notes of the History of Slavery in Massachusetts (New York, 1866), pp. 75-77.

Abolitionist Movement was started as early as the Revolutionary War by people who felt that the ideals of freedom and independence should be given to all people, not only whites. Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth, a Black man and a Black woman, both former slaves, were two of the most powerful Abolitionist speakers. They traveled widely, giving speeches in favor of freedom and equal rights for Blacks, as well as for women. The strong voices of these and other Abolitionists helped keep the hope of freedom alive for Black people in America.

Breaking the Chains

The issue of slavery became one of the hottest conflicts in the U.S. by the middle of the 1800's. The Southern states, who depended for their economic success on the system of slavery, were feeling pressure from the North. The Northern states, who did not need slavery so much, were going more and more in an anti-slavery direction. By the time Abraham Lincoln was inaugurated as President, seven Southern states had decided to pull out of the Union, or secede. The South chose its own President, Jefferson Davis. Fighting soon broke out between the Northern and Southern states and the Civil War was in full swing by 1861.

Over 200,000 Black soldiers enlisted in the Union Army to fight for the North. Black people looked at the Civil War as a great opportunity to gain their freedom from slavery. Black soldiers

fought bravely and 40,000 died on the battlefields. Another 20,000 died of disease during the long struggle. Twenty-two Black soldiers were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for their bravery in the Civil War.

While the Blacks were fighting to end slavery, most white Northerners, along with Lincoln himself, felt that keeping the Union together was the main issue of the war. President Lincoln did not support a total end to slavery until near the end of the war. By that time England had freed her slaves, and this left the U.S. as one of the last major nations to keep slavery. The Abolitionists were putting a lot of pressure on Lincoln to end slavery, but he did not want to totally anger the South by destroying its source of cheap labor. Finally, near the end of the war, he issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which called for an end to slavery in all states fighting against the Union. The Emancipation Proclamation did not have the force of law, and it did not end slavery in all the states, but it was seen as a great moral victory for Black freedom. It was not until the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was passed in 1865, that slavery was totally abolished in the United States.

After the Civil War and the passage of the 13th Amendment, there followed a short period of time during which Black people gained many new freedoms. This period of time is called Reconstruction,

because the main question was how the Union and the South could be put back together after the War. From 1865-70 new laws were passed to help give human rights to Black people. The 13th Amendment abolished slavery, the 14th Amendment granted citizenship to Blacks, and the 15th Amendment gave them the right to vote. Federal troops occupied the South after the war to make sure these laws were enforced. Blacks could now vote and run for office, and many were elected to positions of leadership. An agency called the Freedmen's Bureau was started and sent large numbers of teachers to set up schools for Blacks in the South. Several Black colleges were also started at this time. Among them was Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, which is still one of the leading Black colleges today. The old Slave Codes were done away with at this time, and Black people were beginning to feel a new glimmer of hope.

The Longer Struggle

The feelings and attitudes of most white Southerners did not change magically overnight with the passage of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments. They were not happy about losing both the war and their source of cheap labor. Slaves, whom they had viewed as their property, had been taken away from them. Blacks, whom they had viewed as less than human, had suddenly been granted the same rights and privileges as whites. It was going to take a long time for these feelings to pass away. The end of slavery was only the beginning of Black peoples' struggle for full human freedom.

Immediately after the Civil War, Blacks in the South had gained some new freedom and a sense of power. But when the federal troops were removed by President Hayes in 1876, much of this newly won freedom began to erode away. A system of state laws, city ordinances, and local customs was enacted which put Black people almost back in the same position as slavery. These practices became known as the "Black Codes" and were given the name "Jim Crow" laws by the Black people. "Jim Crow" was used by Blacks to refer to any of the customs or laws whites used to discriminate against Blacks. Jim Crow laws often included the following:

1. A Black person could not testify in court against a white.
2. Blacks could not completely own the land they lived on.
3. Blacks could not go to school with whites.
4. Blacks could not use the same theaters, restaurants, and other public places as whites.
5. Blacks were prevented from voting by poll taxes, literacy tests, or by denying them the right to register.

This period of time has been referred to as the "return of white supremacy." This means that the white people once again set up a system in which they were on the top and Blacks were on the bottom. White supremacy can be seen as an example of racism, because it was based on the belief that whites were superior to Blacks and deserved to keep Blacks down.

The Jim Crow laws were a direct violation of the Constitution and the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments. Human rights which had been guaranteed to Blacks after the Civil War, were now taken away from them. It is interesting that the federal government and the Supreme Court did nothing to protect Blacks at this time in history. Perhaps Northern politicians did not want to cause any more problems with Southern whites. The Supreme Court added even more strength to the Jim Crow laws when it ruled that "separate but equal" education and public facilities for Blacks did not violate the Constitution. Thus, the system of segregation and discrimination against Black people was given the approval of the highest court in our nation. It was going to be a long time before Blacks would actually enjoy the freedom they had fought for in the Civil War.

It was during the reign of white supremacy that the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) grew up in the South. The Klan was a semi-religious and military organization of white males who took it upon themselves to enforce the Black Codes. They dressed themselves in white hoods and robes and burned crosses at night to advertise their meetings or give warnings. They also burned and lynched "uppity" Black people and punished white people who appeared to be too friendly with the Blacks. Many white government officials and community leaders became members of the Klan. Whenever Blacks tried to exercise their legal rights and freedoms during this period, they were confronted with threats and violence. For example, when

Blacks tried to vote in Savannah, Georgia, in 1872, whites rioted and killed 48 Black people. It is estimated that lynchings took the lives of 100 Black people every year during the period of white supremacy.

At the beginning of the 20th century, 90 percent of America's Blacks were still living in the South. Most of them lived in poverty, under a system of farming known as sharecropping. Freed slaves had been promised "forty acres and a mule" after the Civil War, but few received this "stake." Most Blacks ended up farming a section of a white man's land and paying rent by returning a share of the crop to the owner. These Black sharecroppers, as they were called, lived a life only a little better than slavery. They were dependent on the white owner from whom they bought most of their supplies on credit. When the crops were harvested, the major portion went to pay off the landlord. Usually the sharecroppers couldn't afford to totally pay what they owed, so each year they fell deeper in debt and thus more and more at the mercy of their owner. In this way Black sharecroppers were kept in poverty and servitude, unable to break the chains which kept them under the foot of "the man."

Chapter 2 Study Questions

Please answer these questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Describe at least four ways that Black people were able to keep alive their hope of freedom.

2. In what way did Blacks have different ideas than Northern whites about the main issue of the Civil War?

3. Name three laws passed after the Civil War to give new rights to Black people. What right did each law grant to Black people?

4. Describe three "Jim Crow" laws and explain why they were examples of <u>discrimination</u> and <u>racism</u>.

5. Why do you think the federal government and the Supreme Court did not step in to prevent the return of white supremacy in the South after the Civil War?

6. Describe the system of sharecropping and explain why it was almost like slavery for Black people.

Chapter 3

Black Is Beautiful

In the 1800's and the early years of the 20th century, America became the home of new immigrants from all over the world. America was a new kind of country, where people from many different races, cultures, and nationalities could come together to carve out a common destiny. The great ideal at this time was that America would become a human "Melting Pot" into which all races and cultures

would be combined to form a new kind of person, "The American." Immigrants from Italy, Germany, Sweden, or Ireland could change their names to sound more American, learn to speak English, become citizens, jump into the Melting Pot and come out "Americans."

The Melting Pot did not work so well for Blacks and other non-white people, such as Indians, Mexican Americans, and Asians. The ideal of the Melting Pot was assimilation, which meant that everyone should become alike and get rid of the things that made them stand out as different. Black people could not "melt" like European Americans, because they were visibly different in appearance. For them and other non-white people the Melting Pot idea was a myth, which means it was not true and couldn't work. Black people had to find a different way to become fully American. They needed to find a way to be Black and also American, to make their ethnic difference a beautiful thing and not an ugly thing to be hidden or melted away. Their way of doing this became known as cultural pluralism, which is the opposite of the Melting Pot idea. Cultural pluralism places a high value on ethnic differences and ethnic pride. Cultural pluralism says that cultural differences are beautiful and good and should be kept alive, rather than hidden away.

During the first half of the 20th century, Blacks took many steps toward gaining more freedom and pride in their own culture. One of the first steps came during and after World War I when vast numbers of Blacks left the South and began to move into Northern cities like

New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Detroit. Here they faced many struggles and much discrimination, but gradually found homes and jobs which allowed them to escape the bonds of sharecropping in the South. During the 1920's and 1930's there was a great explosion of Black American music, poetry, and art which became known as the Harlem Renaissance. Black artists, writers, and musicians were expressing the feelings, the hopes, and the struggles of Black people. Their work helped give Blacks a sense of common brotherhood, unity, and pride in their Blackness.

Also, many new Black organizations grew up during the first half of the 20th century, including the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), the Black church, the Urban League, and Black lodges and fraternal organizations. These groups enabled Blacks to work together to improve their opportunities in education, jobs, and housing. Some Black people became active in "back-to-Africa" movements such as Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association. These Black nationalist movements did a great deal to create pride in Blackness, but most Black people in America did not want to go back to Africa. America had become their home. They would rather fight for their rights here than leave to start a new Black nation in Africa, as was Garvey's dream.

The cause of Black freedom was greatly aided in 1954 when the Supreme Court reversed its stand on the "separate but equal"

question. For 80 years following the Civil War, the Court had not challenged the racism of Jim Crow laws and other forms of discrimination against Blacks. But in the Brown vs. the Board of Education decision they ruled that separate schools for Blacks were not equal. This decision knocked the legal foundation out from under the supporters of white supremacy. Many whites tried to resist this attempt to end discrimination against Blacks, but the door was now open and there was no turning back.

The 1954 Supreme Court decision set the stage for the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's. During this period of time hundreds of thousands of people, Black as well as white, became actively involved in demonstrations and protests to gain full human and legal rights for all people in America. One of the key events in the beginning of the Civil Rights movement was the Montgomery bus boycott. This boycott began when Rosa Parks, a Black woman, refused to leave her seat in the "whites only" section of a city bus. Mrs. Parks was arrested for breaking the city's segregation laws (Jim Crow laws). As a protest against her arrest, Martin Luther King, Jr. organized a boycott of the city busses. This meant that Black people and sympathetic whites would refuse to ride the city busses until Black people were allowed to sit where they chose. The boycott went on for over a year and the bus company lost 65 percent of its business. Finally, the Supreme Court ruled that segregation on busses was a violation of the U.S. Constitution. The boycott as a form of

non-violent protest had proven to be a powerful weapon for fighting racism. The Civil Rights Movement had won its first great victory.

Following the bus boycott, Black students in the South began organizing lunch counter "sit-ins" in 1960. Several Black students would sit down at a "whites-only" lunch counter and wait to be served. Sit-ins were held across the South and over 1,600 Black students were arrested. Finally they won their victory and Blacks could eat wherever they chose. Black students started their own organization, called the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC or "Snick") to continue their protests for freedom. Another Civil Rights organization, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) started the freedom rides and won equality for Blacks on interstate transportation vehicles. Martin Luther King, Jr., who had become famous through his leadership of the Montgomery bus boycott, started the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). This Civil Rights group put together a massive demonstration in which 200,000 people marched on Washington D.C. in 1963 to speak out for the rights of Black people. Peaceful marches and non-violent demonstrations were the methods which were most often used by Black people as they worked to gain their human rights during the 1960's.

By the middle of the 1960's the Civil Rights Movement had won many victories and made a significant impact on American life. However, some Black leaders felt that an even greater effort was needed to

gain full equality for Blacks in the areas of housing, jobs, education, and standard of living. These leaders saw that Blacks had been caught in a position of powerlessness for 350 years, which meant that they did not have the power to control their own lives. Stokely Carmichael, a leader in SNCC, introduced the idea of Black Power in a speech in 1966. Black Power was a call for Black people to "get it together" and gain the necessary political and economic influence to direct their own lives. Black Power was a call for Blacks to run their own businesses, teach in their schools, become political leaders in their own communities, and work together to fight the effects of racism.

Black Power was a more militant idea than the nonviolence of the earlier 1960's, which means that it called for Blacks to become more aggressive and forceful than they had been so far. Black Power was frightening to many whites, because they feared that an outburst of violence might come from the Blacks. The main idea behind Black Power was not violence, but rather self-determination. Blacks were making a strong statement of their intention to determine the direction of their own lives.

Violence did break out, however, in the 1960's in the form of riots in most of America's major cities. Riots occured in Harlem in 1964, in the Watts community of Los Angeles in 1965, in Cleveland in 1967 and in Detroit in 1968. After the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., in April of 1968, violence broke out in 125 cities and

over 70,000 state and federal troops were activated to quiet the streets. The reasons behind these riots are complicated, but in general they involved Blacks engaging in confrontations with the police and other symbols of white control and ownership in their own communities. The riots were a symptom of the great amount of anger and resentment that had been building up in the souls of Blacks ever since the first slave was sold on American soil.

The riots, the strong language used by some Black leaders, and the formation of a militant group called the Black Panther Party were frightening realities for many white Americans. They were getting their first clear look at how deeply and bitterly the treatment of the past had affected Black people in America. Underneath all the excitement and headlines, Black people were asking for very simple and basic things: (1) the right to good schools, (2) the right to vote without fear of punishment, (3) the right to equal opportunity in jobs, (4) the right to decent housing in the neighborhood of their choice, and (5) the right to be respected as a human being.

During the 1970's most of white America responded to the violence of the 1960's by making a strong appeal to law and order. They wanted things to settle down, stop changing so quickly, and become less frightening. Politicians across the country started talking much more about law and order than about human rights for Black people. Also, the Civil Rights movement slowed down during the

1970's. Martin Luther King, Jr. had himself become the victim of violence, being assassinated in 1968. The Black movement needed new leadership and new directions. Almost 90 percent of the Black voters turned out in 1976 to support the Democrats and Jimmy Carter for President because he had made many promises to help with the cause of human rights. However, by the time he had been President for one year it was clear to Blacks that most of what he had promised them would never happen during the Carter administration.

The Rev. Jesse Jackson is one example of the Black people who are emerging today to meet the need for new leadership. Jackson calls his organization PUSH, which stands for "People United to Save Humanity." He is sending forth a strong challenge for all Black people to strive for excellence in the areas of education, business and politics. In his speeches he encourages Black people across the country to pull together in a united effort to win the freedoms and gain the opportunities which have so often been denied them in the past. Through the work of Jesse Jackson and other great leaders who have come before him, Americans are now realizing that "Black" is a beautiful and valuable part of this nation.

Black American Contributions

Throughout history Black people have made valuable contributions to the quality of American life. Their 350-year struggle to overcome slavery and discrimination stands as a powerful statement of the strength of the human spirit. In spite of the barriers of prejudice and racism, individual Black people have achieved

greatness in many areas.

In the area of science, Benjamin Banneker was a Black astronomer and mathematician. He helped survey and plan the city of Washington D.C. He also designed one of the first clocks to be manufactured in the United States. Dr. Charles Drew was a pioneer in the science of preserving blood plasma, which made blood banks possible. Another Black doctor, Daniel Hale Williams, performed the first successful open heart surgery.

Blacks have also achieved greatness in the fields of writing, art, and public leadership. Frederick Douglass started one of the earliest Black newspapers, the North Star. Langston Hughes became one of the great American writers during the Harlem Renaissance in his poems, plays, and novels. Blacks have also produced famous works in the areas of painting, sculpture, and architecture. Booker T. Washington was a gifted educator who helped make Tuskegee Institute in Alabama one of the first great colleges for Blacks. The NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), one of the nation's early groups to fight for the rights of Black people, was started by W.E.B. DuBois. Martin Luther King, Jr., as we have already seen, became one of the world's most renowned citizens through his leadership in the Civil Rights Movement. Julian Bond, a Black member of the Georgia state legislature for years, has become a significant national political figure. Andrew Young served our country as

Ambassador to the United Nations during the 1970's. Also in recent years Black leaders have been elected to many high offices. Several major American cities have elected Black mayors, including Cleveland, Los Angeles, Detroit, Atlanta, and Newark, New Jersey. Shirley Chisholm is a powerful speaker and politician who became the first Black woman to serve in the U.S. Congress in 1968.

Blacks in the performing arts have added much to the American experience. Leontyne Price, a concert and opera singer, has performed in every major opera house in the world. James Earl Jones has achieved greatness as an actor on stage and screen, and won a Tony Award for his performance in The Great White Hope. Sidney Poitier became the first Black actor to win an Oscar for his performance in Lilies of the Field. The world of jazz music as it is known today would never have been created without Black musicians such as Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong and later John Coltrane and Ramsey Lewis. And, of course, Black Americans have provided our country with more talented singers than can be listed here, including Nat "King" Cole, Johnny Mathis, Aretha Franklin, and Ella Fitzgerald, who has become known as "the first lady of song." Other great Black singers include Stevie Wonder, Jimi Hendrix, and Donna Summers.

One of the first Black athletes to break through the barriers of discrimination was Jack Johnson, who became the first Black man to win the heavyweight boxing championship in 1908. Jackie

Robinson opened the door for Black athletes in baseball when he earned his way into the major leagues in 1947. Althea Gibson won fame in tennis when she became the first Black woman to win the Wimbledon Tournament. The first Black male to win that same honor was Arthur Ashe. Jim Brown, Carl Eller, and O. J. Simpson, in football, and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Elgin Baylor, and Julius (Dr. J.) Erving, in basketball represent the many Black professional athletes who have achieved greatness in those sports.

Black people have also added much richness to America through their humor and language. Comedians like Bill Cosby and Dick Gregory have been able to combine humor with strong comments about human rights. Flip Wilson has kept American television audiences rolling in the aisles for many years with his jokes, stories, skits, and impersonations. Also, the vocabulary and speaking style which has become known as "Black English," offers many rich possibilities for expression. Parts of Black English have been adopted by almost all Americans. Terms such as "cool," "dig," "hip," "square," and "jive" were invented out of the Black experience. In Black English, "pick" means a special comb used for "natural" hair styles, and "a bad ride" means a smart looking car.

Black Americans have always been a valuable and important part of the American experience. Today they are working vigorously to deal with the problems of the past. They are demonstrating to the world and themselves the beauty of Blackness.

Chapter 3 Study Questions

Please answer these questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Explain why the "Melting Pot" idea was an example of assimilation. Why didn't the Melting Pot work for Black people?

2. Why did most Black Americans not want to take part in back-to-Africa movements such as that started by Marcus Garvey?

3. Why was the Supreme Court's 1954 decision in Brown vs. the Board of Education so important to Black people?

4. The Montgomery bus boycott was the first major victory of the Civil Rights movement. What right were Blacks trying to win?

5. Did Black people use mostly peaceful or mostly violent means to win their victories in the Civil Rights movement? Give two examples of methods they used.

6. Why do you think many Americans became more interested in law and order instead of civil rights during the 1970's?

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